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SUBJECT: LAWSUIT DROPPED AGAINST HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDER LEYLA YUNUS

¶1. (SBU) The Minister of Internal Affairs dropped his lawsuit against human rights defender Leyla Yunus scheduled at the Yasamal District Court. The hearing, the first since the trial was moved from the Nasimi District Court, was set to start at 11:00 a.m. on March 2. The announcement about the withdrawal came from the lawyer of Leyla Yunus, Isakhan Ashurov, who was at the meeting with the judge to discuss the case before it started. Representatives of the international community, media, and civil society were waiting outside to be invited into the room for the hearing. However, before the hearing started, Isakhan Ashurov came out and announced that the lawsuit was being dropped so no trial would take place.

¶2. (SBU) In a telephone conversation with an Embassy official, Leyla Yunus said that she would not make any public statement for the media before seeing the written court decision. She mentioned the verdict would be passed to her on March 3 by her lawyer.

¶3. (SBU) As a statement for the U.S. Embassy only, Yunus said that the decision of dropping the case against her is a result of international pressure put on the Ministry of Internal Affairs since the lawsuit had been filed. She stated that during one of the meetings between officials from the Ministry and her lawyer, the Ministry officials said that there were too many appeals and letters coming to them and their number was constantly growing. Ministry officials asked the lawyer to stop asking for letters, as they were considering dropping the lawsuit. Yunus believes that this information proves the effectiveness of support and attention coming from the international community.

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